

Behavior Change Communication



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Program experience shows that behavior change messages should reach priority audiences frequently, focus on specific behaviors, and be communicated through multiple channels. LINKAGES' communication strategy, which includes interpersonal communication, mass media, and traditional media, was instrumental in improving infant feeding behaviors in several countries within a relatively short period of time and at a scale that could achieve significant public health impact. LINKAGES teamed with local organizations in these countries and applied a systematic behavior change orientation to its policy advocacy, capacity building, and communication interventions.¹

This issue of *Experience LINKAGES* describes essential infant feeding behaviors, priority audiences, simple and direct messages, and supportive materials and media that feature in the project's communication strategy.

Behavior-oriented Communication Strategy

Reducing infant and young child deaths and illness through improved feeding behaviors is the driving force behind LINKAGES' behavior change communication strategy. To create this strategy, LINKAGES engages key stakeholders and partners through policy and program advocacy workshops. The project reviews, collects, and analyzes primary and secondary survey and qualitative data to identify priority audiences, their current behaviors, and opportunities to promote change. LINKAGES also conducts action-oriented formative research such as household trials, counseling observations, key informant interviews, facility-level assessments, and community and market visits to better understand barriers and readiness to change behaviors.

The findings of the literature review, surveys, and formative research guide the development of strategies and project activities that will promote behavior change among priority audiences. These activities include skills building workshops, development and pretesting of messages and materials, and use of multiple channels of communications. The result is a collage of locally tailored approaches based on:

- consistent messages about small, doable actions
- negotiated behavior change during counseling and group discussions
- mutually reinforcing print materials, mass media, organized support networks, and community events

The impact of these approaches on knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors is measured through baselines, rapid assessment procedures, and endline surveys that track key behavioral indicators over time. Performance monitoring, media surveys, and qualitative studies provide additional information on message delivery through various channels and message recall by priority audiences.

Experience LINKAGES is a series of publications on the strategies, tools, and materials used by the LINKAGES Project to achieve results.

¹ See "Experience LINKAGES Results" (April 2003) and "Experience LINKAGES Program Approach" (May 2003) for more information on LINKAGES' strategies, project indicators, and results achieved in Bolivia, Ghana, Jordan, Madagascar, and Zambia.

Essential Behaviors

Breastfeeding is an infant and young child feeding practice made up of several distinct and critical behaviors. A behavior is a visible action. An optimal breastfeeding behavior is one that is specific, feasible, measurable, and directly linked to improved health outcomes. This behavior can be measured by time, place, frequency, duration, and/or quantity.

Policymakers and health care providers worldwide often take breastfeeding for granted. They make statements such as, “Breastfeeding isn’t a problem; nearly all mothers breastfeed.” What they fail to recognize is that breastfeeding ‘becomes a problem’ when specific breastfeeding behaviors are not practiced.

“In Ghana one problem we encountered was ‘breastfeeding on the run’. At each feed mothers gave a little bit of milk from both breasts, so children were not suckling enough to get the rich hind milk. Because of this, mothers were tempted to give other foods since they thought their babies were hungry—and they were! The standard message to give the breast at least 10 times a day was thus inappropriate for Ghana since mothers were already giving the breast as much as 20 times a day.”

— LINKAGES Ghana Program

LINKAGES promotes eight optimal infant feeding behaviors during the first six months that help prevent infant mortality and morbidity associated with diarrhea and acute respiratory infections. These behaviors help mothers establish and maintain breastfeeding. They also contribute to child growth and development and child spacing.

A mother practices optimal breastfeeding during the first six months when she:

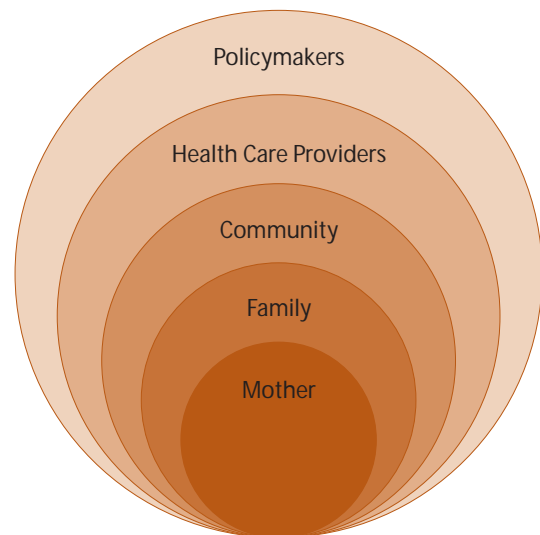
1. initiates breastfeeding within one hour of birth
2. positions and attaches infant correctly at the breast
3. breastfeeds frequently during the day
4. breastfeeds during the night
5. offers second breast after infant empties the first
6. gives only breastmilk
7. continues breastfeeding when she is sick
8. increases breastfeeding frequency during and after infant’s illness

LINKAGES takes this same approach of identifying specific, optimal behaviors when promoting complementary feeding, the lactational amenorrhea method of contraception, and maternal nutrition. These behaviors are carefully re-examined in special circumstances, such as in communities affected by HIV.²

Priority Audiences

LINKAGES’ five priority audiences for behavior change are mothers, family members, community networks, health providers, and policymakers, as illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1. LINKAGES Audiences for Behavior Change



Mother. Improved breastfeeding practices are more likely to occur if a woman perceives them as beneficial, feasible, and socially acceptable. Individual behavior change for improved infant and child feeding practices can be achieved through small, doable actions negotiated with pregnant and lactating women. LINKAGES communicates these actions at the community and facility levels through simple, direct messages that clearly encourage the mother to take action and remind her of the benefits. For example, “Mother, put your baby to the breast immediately after delivery to protect your baby against disease.”

Family. Comments and actions by family members build or undermine a woman’s confidence and her determination to adopt and maintain new practices. To ensure that family members and caregivers are advocates of good breastfeeding practices and sup-

² See LINKAGES’ “Facts for Feeding” 6–24 Months and “Frequently Asked Questions” on Maternal Nutrition, LAM, and Breastfeeding and HIV/AIDS.

port breastfeeding women, husbands and grandmothers—sometimes referred to as “household policymakers”—and other caregivers are priority audiences in many of LINKAGES’ country programs.

Community. Along with individual behavior change, LINKAGES’ goal is to establish the recommended behaviors as the norm in society so that they become expected, approved, and valued. A shift in public opinion can happen once a critical mass of support has been created. Lay counselors, women’s groups, community health promoters, traditional birth attendants and healers, agricultural extension agents, teachers, religious leaders, and other influential individuals in the community can increase access to information and help create this supportive environment. LINKAGES reaches these audiences through training activities, educational sessions, community events, and the media.

Health care providers. Health workers can provide accurate information, assure women that they will be able to breastfeed, help them establish and maintain lactation, and refer them to support networks in their community. Training health workers in counseling skills and the technical content of infant and young child feeding is a main component of LINKAGES’ behavior change strategy. LINKAGES and its partners have developed pre-service curricula, in-service training modules, and job aids so that current and future health care and community workers are equipped to

promote and support improved infant and young child feeding practices.

Policymakers. Policymakers represent another important audience. They determine priorities, allocate funds, set standards of care, and establish laws and regulations. Political commitment brings visibility to the importance of infant and young child feeding and mobilizes support and resources. Without this support, breastfeeding promotion activities are often limited in scope and scale. LINKAGES’ messages to policymakers focus on the impact of sub-optimal breastfeeding practices on their country’s health, education, economy, and development.

Messages, Materials, and Media

Table 1 illustrates how one of LINKAGES’ main messages—breastfeed exclusively to six months—is tailored to different audiences and communicated through various channels. Examples from LINKAGES’ country programs of three types of communication channels—interpersonal, mass media, and traditional—follow.

Interpersonal Communication

Interpersonal communication is critical to changing individual behavior in a culture where “talk” is the primary form of communication. The health promoter

Table 1. Recommended Behavior: Infant receives only breastmilk for the first six months

Audience	Messages and Appeals	Channels
Mothers (Madagascar)	Mother, show proof of love. Take good care of your child at birth. Give him breastmilk so he will grow well and be strong. Breastmilk is the only energy he needs to protect him until his sixth month.	Song on radio, TV, CD, video, and in concerts by a famous Malagasy pop singer
Grandmothers (Ghana)	Grannies, help mothers practice exclusive breastfeeding so your grandchildren grow up to be “plumpy,” strong, and intelligent.	Counseling card for grandmothers
Community opinion leaders (Jordan)	Women religious leaders can promote breastfeeding. The Koran encourages women to breastfeed for two years.	Advocacy meeting
Health care providers (Madagascar and other African countries)	Provide breastfeeding counseling and support during six health contact points: prenatal, delivery and immediate postpartum, postnatal and family planning, immunization, growth monitoring/well child, and sick child consultation (IMCI).	Cards with protocols for each health contact point
Policymakers (Indonesia)	Suboptimal breastfeeding practices result in an estimated 25,000 infant deaths in Indonesia each year and cost the government \$20 million for health care services.	PowerPoint presentation and script

can personalize the message, ask and respond to questions, teach and demonstrate skills, and provide ongoing encouragement and support. Interpersonal communication can take place during home visits, group discussions, informal encounters in the community, and counseling sessions at health centers.

LINKAGES' training modules include sessions on counseling and negotiation skills and the effective use of counseling cards, flip charts, and other job aids during individual and group contacts. During training, participants practice using the materials in role-plays in the classroom and then in the community with the priority audience. They are encouraged to go beyond "giving the message" by asking the individual or audience to imagine barriers they may have in adopting the recommended behavior and to think of ways of overcoming them. Experience suggests that a woman who tries a new negotiated practice for a few days, modifies it to fit her situation, and sees the benefits to herself and to her infant is more likely to continue the practice.

Changing an individual's behavior is not enough. To maintain the new practice, women need to be surrounded by a supportive community that also believes

in the value of the new practice. LINKAGES works through women's groups to improve their capacity to support breastfeeding women. In the support groups, women share information and experience and offer support in an atmosphere of trust and respect. LINKAGES has provided training in the facilitation of mother-to-mother support groups in Bolivia, Ghana, India, Jordan, and Madagascar.

LINKAGES' country programs developed a variety of print materials to assist health providers and community workers in their communications with different audiences. Print materials can remind people of the messages and give more detailed information. If used well, they can help persuade an individual to try a new behavior.

The primary job aid in LINKAGES' programs is the counseling card. Counseling cards can provide credibility and recognition for health agents and promoters. They are a tool for introducing a new practice and drawing a mother into discussion of the behavior, as illustrated in Figure 2. As part of the "negotiation" process, the health or community worker encourages the woman to try out the new behavior shown on the

Red Cross Mothers Club, Ghana

A thatched roof, supported by several posts, protects a group of 20 mothers from 100-degree heat in the mud-walled village of Deega in the Upper East Region of Ghana. The women, most of whom are illiterate, represent eight households. Some are co-wives and share the same husband. They farm and earn a little income by parboiling rice and sending it to the market.

Twice a month the women gather to sing, discuss a health topic, and share their experiences. They often shell peanuts during their meeting. The youngest person in the circle is two-month-old Amsha. The women in the group refer to Amsha as the club's second "experimental child" because she is the second one to be exclusively breastfed. The leader of the group (Amsha's grandmother) came back from a Red Cross training telling club members that children between the ages of 0–6 months need only breastmilk and that the tradition of giving water to young infants leads to illness. Club members started hearing the same new message on the radio and at the antenatal clinic, child welfare clinic, and hospital.

At first many in Deega doubted that a child could survive without water. Amsha's grandfather was one of the skeptics. When he saw that the first exclusively breastfed "experimental" child was healthy, his resistance broke down, especially when he realized that the family could save money by not having to buy drugs to treat a sick child. During meetings of the mothers club, Amsha's grandfather often sits with several older men outside the circle, listening in on the discussion. One day after the meeting, he pointed to the other old men around him and said, "We're drawing nearer to our graves. We want strong and healthy children to replace us."

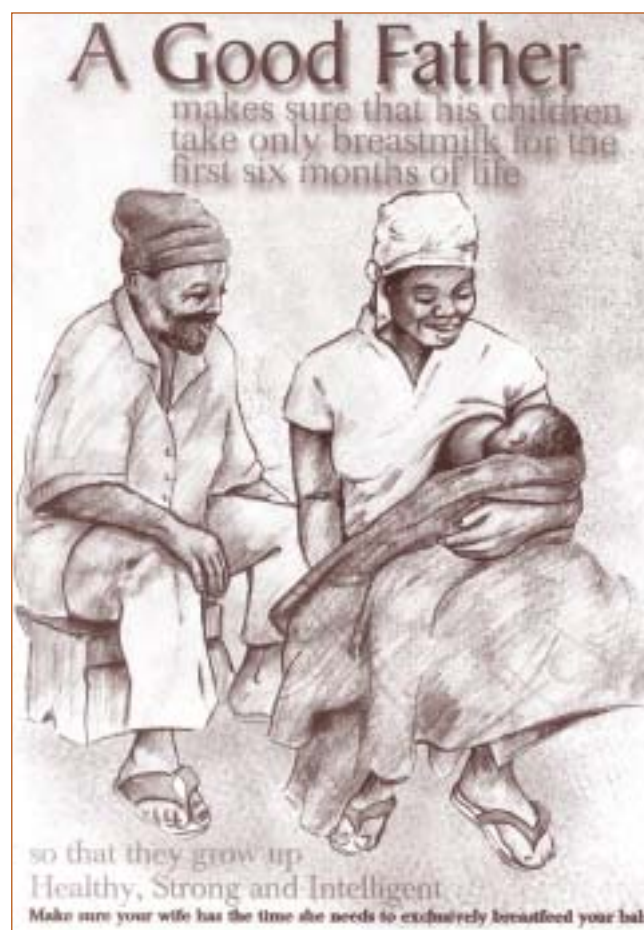




counseling card and sets a time to return several days later to check how the “trial” has gone and to offer encouragement. LINKAGES and its partners in Bolivia and Madagascar developed manuals for health promoters that introduce the concepts of interpersonal counseling, identify the key message with supporting information on each counseling card, and offer step-by-step guidelines for use of the cards.

LINKAGES promotes the encouragement and support of breastfeeding women by their family members. The theme of a breastfeeding campaign in Ghana was “Breastfeeding: A Wise Family Choice.” LINKAGES and its partners distributed posters throughout northern Ghana with an image of a man admiring his wife and breastfeeding child. The message appealed to the man’s desire to be a good father with the words: “A good father makes sure that his children take only breastmilk for the first six months so that they grow up healthy, strong, and intelligent. Make sure your wife has the time she needs to exclusively breastfeed your baby.”

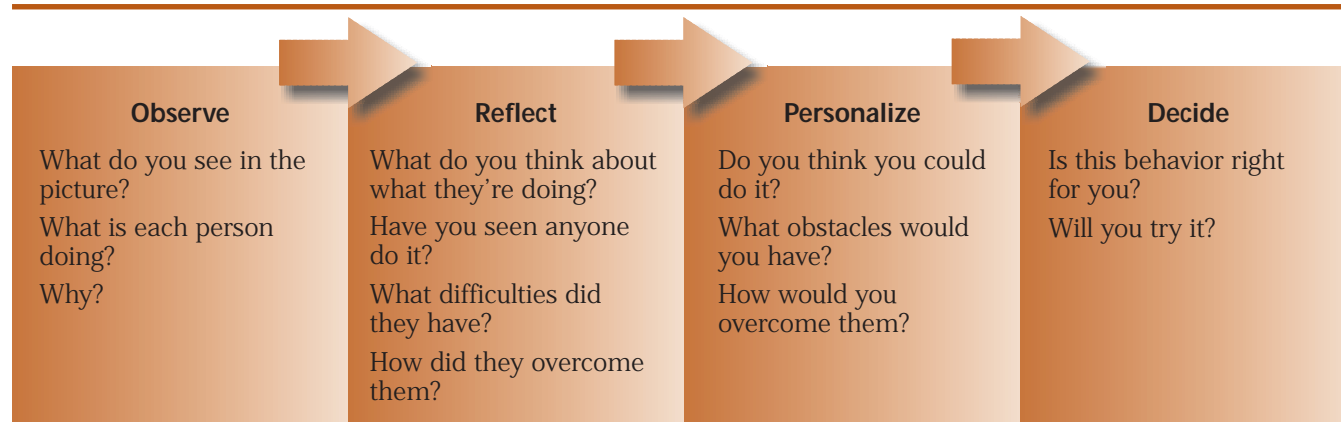
The most challenging message to convey visually is the three criteria for the lactational amenorrhea method. The illustrator must convey absence of a



physical condition (no return of menses), an age (baby less than six months), and a feeding pattern (full or nearly full breastfeeding). In some countries, such as Jordan, the Ministry of Health uses exclusive breastfeeding as the criterion because it provides maximum nutritional and health benefits for the infant.

Illustrations alone are not enough to explain the LAM criteria. They need to be accompanied by verbal or written explanations. One-to-one communication is

Figure 2. Using Counseling Cards to Negotiate Behavior Change



In Bolivia LINKAGES and its partners encourage men to support breastfeeding but with a less direct message than in Ghana. In rural Bolivia 57 percent of births are attended by a family member or friend (usually the husband), and the majority of community health promoters are men. Male community health volunteers often schedule visits for Sundays when husbands are at home.

The flipcharts and counseling cards developed for use by promoters show images of a man encouraging his wife to initiate breastfeeding immediately after delivery, caring for an older child while his wife breastfeeds the new baby, and feeding complementary foods to an older infant. These images also appear on calendars that the promoters give to families with children under two years. Three sets of counseling cards were developed to reflect different physical and socio-cultural characteristics of the country's three eco-regions. The messages, with the exception of a few local foods for young children, are the same in the three sets.



particularly valuable in this instance because it allows the health promoter or family planning service provider to clarify and respond to questions. The Ministry of Health in Jordan and LINKAGES developed the counseling cards below to illustrate the LAM criteria.

Various other print materials have been developed in LINKAGES' programs to convey messages to priority audiences. Examples of these materials include:

- Calendars (Bolivia, Ghana, and Madagascar)
- Client brochures (Bolivia and Jordan)
- Cloth flipcharts (Bolivia)
- Comic books on breastfeeding, LAM, and support groups (Guatemala)
- Danglers in the marketplace (India)
- Invitation cards to discuss LAM (Madagascar)
- Literacy booklets (Nepal)
- Newsletters (Madagascar)
- Newspaper articles (all programs)
- Posters (Ghana and Madagascar)

Mass Media

LINKAGES uses mass media to reinforce messages and interpersonal communications, raise awareness, extend reach, and create a supportive social environment for behavior change. In Ghana the LINKAGES team involves journalists and radio producers from the three northern regions in program planning, message and materials development, skills workshops, and

technical updates. This close working relationship enables professional radio broadcasters to craft entertaining and technically accurate programs that appeal to their listeners. Sometimes the producers broadcast songs of women's groups and interviews with mothers that they have recorded at LINKAGES' training exercises in communities. Programs use a variety of formats such as radio call-in shows, quiz programs, dramatic comedies, panel discussions, and advice from community leaders.

Results of LINKAGES' 2002 rapid assessment procedure in northern Ghana indicate that radio is an effective vehicle for relaying messages. Among those surveyed, 70 percent of mothers, 87 percent of fa-

Infant less than six months



No menses



Exclusive breastfeeding day and night





In Madagascar the cost of producing and distributing all of the counseling cards to thousands of community health promoters would be prohibitive. Instead of the cards, promoters receive an enlarged copy of the child health booklet. The booklet—recommended for use throughout the country by the Ministry of Health—contains in one place the main messages of the counseling cards. Parents purchase the health booklet for each child less than five

years of age and carry it with them every time they take the child to a health center. The promoters use the enlarged version of the booklet during home visits, group discussions, and community health awareness events.

The booklet includes information on immunization schedules, vitamin A supplementation, deworming, infant and young child feeding, women's nutrition, growth monitoring, LAM and other modern family planning methods, and management of childhood illness. Messages are presented through text and illustrations. The images, which become associated with specific messages, appear on counseling cards, posters, banners, newsletters, and other materials.



thers, and 59 percent of grandmothers reported listening to the radio. Of those listeners, 89 percent of mothers, 94 percent of fathers, and 91 percent of grandmothers recalled hearing at least one message on infant and child feeding on the radio.

Radio also features prominently in the programs in Bolivia and Madagascar. During a radio campaign in Bolivia, radio listeners heard messages in three languages communicated through short publicity messages, dramas, testimonials, and five original songs, ranging from traditional to rap. In Madagascar LINKAGES organized and sponsored 2,646 radio and 92 television broadcasts of LAM spots on local and national stations over three months, with the spots running one week each month. During the 2001 rapid assessment procedure in Madagascar, women surveyed in the project districts who said that they heard or saw a LAM media spot were nine times more likely to know the three criteria for use of the lactational amenorrhea method than those who were unaware of the spots.

Traditional and Community-based Media

Songs, drama, storytelling, puppet shows, baby shows, health fairs, and community festivals are examples of traditional media used to promote breastfeeding. They are entertaining ways of sharing information, celebrating accomplishments, launching new activities, and mobilizing and recognizing community health volunteers.

Traditional media play a major role in the annual celebration of World Breastfeeding Week. In 2002 LINKAGES-sponsored activities during World Breast-

feeding Week included a parade in Guatemala, an art competition and walk in India, and educational fairs in city plazas in Bolivia. In Ghana communities celebrated the week with parades and festivals attended by chiefs, elders, opinion leaders, members of the district assembly, and community members. Women wore tee-shirts with the theme of that year's World Breastfeeding Week (Healthy Mothers, Healthy Babies) and sang songs they had composed about infant feeding as they marched through the streets. Some community festivals featured songs about breastfeeding, skits, testimonials, and speeches. One community awarded soap and plastic buckets to women who had exclusively breastfed their babies.

Multiple Communication Channels

Interpersonal communication, mass media, and traditional media all play a role in efforts to help individuals and communities adopt and advocate for healthy behaviors. Together, they reinforce messages and remind audiences of the desired behaviors. LINKAGES' communication activities expand public and private dialogue on issues related to infant and young child feeding. They bring together different groups to achieve a common goal and equip them with information and skills to achieve it.

The project's increased rates of timely initiation of breastfeeding and exclusive breastfeeding of infants less than six months testify to the effectiveness of an applied behavior change approach that uses multiple channels to promote small, doable actions that are supported by policies, health services, and community networks.

The Singing Ambassador, Madagascar

When Poopy, a popular singer in Madagascar, gave birth to her second child, LINKAGES invited the experienced breastfeeding mother to serve as the national Breastfeeding Ambassador. She agreed and recorded three songs on breastfeeding and one on complementary feeding. "Proof of Love" ("Porofom – pitivavana") was particularly popular. The pop singer included it on one of her CDs and on a video clip. More than 20 radio stations broadcast the song, and all television stations showed the video clip.



Over a two-year period Poopy performed one or two of her infant feeding songs at 24 concerts. More than 150,000 people—the majority of them young women—attended these concerts. Besides the words of the songs, concert goers heard Poopy talk about breastfeeding and complementary feeding during her concert and saw banners and posters with key messages displayed. Periodically Poopy holds press conferences and promotes breastfeeding on television shows. She talks about the LAM criteria in a radio spot, and her picture appears on cards inviting women to discuss LAM with a health promoter or family planning provider. Poopy's next song will feature messages on maternal nutrition.



Proof of Love

Mother,

*The one you waited for
Is now on earth
The one you carried in your womb so long
Mother,
Look at those eyes, staring at you with trust*

Mother,

*Look at those small hands
Holding tightly to you
Because he loves you
Mother,
Do not forget
That his whole life is resting
Upon you*

Chorus:

*Take good care of your child at birth
Give him breastmilk so he will grow well
And strong
Breastmilk is the only energy
He needs to protect him
Until his sixth month.*

Spoken words:

Mother, show proof of love to your child; give him breastmilk.

View LINKAGES behavior change materials at www.linkagesproject.org



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